

United States Senate

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September 8, 2022

COMMITTEE ON
APPROPRIATIONS

COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION,
AND FORESTRY

COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND
NATURAL RESOURCES

COMMITTEE ON
RULES AND
ADMINISTRATION

The Honorable Shalanda Young
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Director Young:

I am writing regarding the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) supplemental funding request submitted on September 2, 2022, which calls on Congress to appropriate an additional \$47.1 billion for needs deemed critical by the Administration. Those needs include: Support for Ukraine, COVID-19, monkeypox, and natural disaster recovery. I am deeply concerned that the administration's emergency funding request fails to address the serious and ongoing water crisis in Jackson, Mississippi.

The City of Jackson serves as the State capital and is the most populous city in Mississippi. On August 29, 2022, floodwaters from the Pearl River overwhelmed the city's primary water treatment plant, resulting in system-wide failure. Approximately 150,000 residents were left without a steady flow of safe drinking water, adequate water pressure to flush toilets, or to fight fires. President Biden issued an Emergency Declaration on August 30, 2022, allowing federal agencies to take temporary measures to begin restoring water to residents, schools, public services, and businesses. In fact, the city remains under a boil water notice implemented more than a month ago.

Unfortunately, the water infrastructure crises Jackson residents are facing is not new. A winter storm in February 2021 left tens of thousands of residents without running water, some for up to a month. Storms in 2010, 2014, and 2018 resulted in similar water outages. The crumbling water infrastructure in Jackson has plagued residents for decades, and the required cost of water and wastewater system improvements are estimated to be more than \$2 billion. That is simply not feasible for the state and local governments alone.

According to United States Census Bureau data, 82.5 percent of Jackson's population is African American. The median household income is \$40,064 (\$27,457 below the national average), and 24.5 percent of the population lives in poverty (13.1 percent above the national average). Nearly 24,000 residents have left the city since the 2010 Census. It is fair to presume that some Jackson residents have fled due to the lack of reliable access to one of our most vital necessities of life – clean water.

While I am grateful for the level of attention the Administration has given to the City of Jackson's ongoing water crisis, the OMB supplemental funding request fails to meet what the city truly needs. Jackson needs significant funding for improvements to its water and wastewater system infrastructure. The supplemental appropriations request fails to address those dire and immediate needs. For instance, the \$1.4 billion Department of Housing and Urban Development request for Community Development Block Grants is only for major disasters that occurred in 2021. The \$2.9 billion Department of Homeland Security Disaster Relief Fund request is for response costs, not long-term solutions. The \$50 million U.S. Army Corps of Engineers request is only for investigations and operation and maintenance of existing systems with respect to drought resilience, not construction of congressionally-authorized environmental infrastructure projects. The OMB news release accompanying its supplemental request mentions natural disaster response needs for California, Kentucky, Louisiana, and Texas, but makes no mention of Mississippi.

There are available avenues to provide direct assistance to the City of Jackson for its crumbling water infrastructure. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers received \$5 million in fiscal year 2022 to address Jackson's water infrastructure through its Section 219 Program, authorized under the Water Resources Development Act of 1992, as amended. The City of Jackson received \$4 million in congressionally-directed spending in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022, through the Environmental Protection Agency Drinking Water State Revolving Fund. Further, the State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial Fiscal Recovery, Infrastructure, and Disaster Relief Flexibility Act (S. 3011), which was passed in the Senate by unanimous consent, would allow states and local governments to use previously appropriated COVID-19 relief funds for new categories of spending, including for natural disasters and infrastructure projects. These are just a few examples of how Jackson could soon receive adequate and additional relief for its ongoing water crisis should Congress enact a supplemental spending measure as part of a short-term continuing resolution before September 30, 2022.

Support for Ukraine, COVID-19, monkeypox, or natural disasters in other states should not take priority over the needs of Jackson residents to have access to clean water. As I continue working with my Senate colleagues on this important issue, I respectfully request that you consider submitting an addendum to the supplemental funding request that your agency submitted to Congress on September 2, 2022.

Sincerely,



CINDY HYDE-SMITH
United States Senator